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INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 6438
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 3759
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7633
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 4885
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2131
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2212
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4326
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4768
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9358
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: COCHABAMBA UPDATE: TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH

REF: LA PAZ 54

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Following the January 8 violent attacks on the Cochabamba prefecture by MAS militants, Cochabamba remains isolated due its encirclement by MAS activists. The Cochabamba civic committee called for a peace demonstration on January 9 but the rally was canceled after MAS militants threw rocks and fire crackers at the people building the stage. Due to much negative press, the GOB has tried to distance itself from the January 8 violent attacks on the Cochabamba prefecture by MAS militants and its firing of police commandant Wilge Obleas. MAS Senator Oscar Fernandes, who participated in the January 8 protests, has stated that he will ask his fellow congressman to approve a referendum regarding the revocation of Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa's mandate. On January 9, Cochabamba Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa, the target of the protests, sent a letter to the Organization of American States (OAS) requesting the Secretary General's intervention. End Summary.

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City under Siege

¶2. (SBU) Cochabamba remains isolated due its encirclement by MAS activists; many of whom are reportedly drunk and have attacked people trying to pass through the blockades. There are reports of sporadic attacks throughout the city. The Cochabamba civic committee called for a peace and democracy rally on January 10. The rally was canceled after MAS militants threw rocks and fire crackers at the construction workers building the stage. Reports are the some of the militants were carrying machetes. In response the Cochabamba civic committee called for a "stay-at-home" strike in which supporters would not leave their homes or engage in any form of business.

¶3. (SBU) Due to much negative press, the GOB has tried to distance itself from the January 8 violent attacks on the Cochabamba prefecture by MAS militants and its firing of police commandant Wilge Obleas. President Morales and GOB officials have called for peace and dialog. While not fully condemning the violence, on January 9, Morales stated that it was "unfortunate that certain groups, compatriots, became violent." Morales, in an apparent rebuke of the Minister of Government, Alicia Munoz, announced that to the best of his knowledge police commandant was not fired. Other officials added that the GOB will investigate who authorized the police's use of "excessive force" against the protesters. UN party Deputy Guillermo Mendoza claimed that a call from National Police Commandant General Miguel Vasquez convinced Morales to overturn Munoz's decision to fire Obleas. Vasquez is said to have explained to Morales that firing Obleas without an investigation would be very detrimental to the police force "esprit de corps." Minister Munoz explained that she had not fired the commandant, that she had only relieved him. She provided no explanation regarding the difference between the firing and the relieving of a senior police officer.

A Referendum to Oust Prefect Reyes?

¶4. (SBU) MAS Senator Oscar Fernandes, who participated in the January 8 protests, publicly stated that he will ask his fellow congressman to approve a referendum regarding the revocation of Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa,s mandate. The National Election Court (CNE) responded that the legislative act to convene such a referendum would have to be reviewed by the Constitutional Court. Assuming the Constitution Court approved the legislation, CNE President, Salvador Romero said it was prepared to support such a referendum.

Reyes Writes a Letter

¶5. (SBU) On January 9, Cochabamba Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa, the target of the protests, sent a letter to the Organization of American States (OAS) requesting the Secretary General's intervention. Citing several

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articles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter
Prefect Reyes requested that the OAS send a delegation
to evaluate the situation in Bolivia and more
specifically Cochabamba.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) The situation in Cochabamba remains extremely tense with no signs of either side backing down. Post will continue to monitor developments. End Comment.
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